

## **(U) Ask Zelda!: How to Deal with Resistant Reggie**

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The entire article below is unclassified.

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I have a question for Zelda. It happens in every office, there's the one person that is stuck in his or her ways and complains nonstop. In my office in particular, I'm training an employee that's been a linguist, a programmer, and now learning an entirely new trade. When I show the person how to do something, he finds a detail that he doesn't like and argues with me for well over an hour. In addition, his other duties are completely neglected and he's not being held accountable. This has of course deterred me from working with him. Now he's complaining to the boss about it. I've told the boss about the constant arguing and I'm told to find a way to train him. I'm the fourth person to have these problems, the other three have since moved on. What would help me stop the arguments before they even start?

--Losing Patience

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Dear LP,  
Have you tried duct tape?

No, I'm just kidding. But I know you wanted to... am I right? ;-)

I'm going to give you several options. You may have to use the shotgun approach--trying different tactics to see which will work.

### **Past success**

From what you've said, it sounds like this person has burned through 3 other trainers before you. Did any of them have any success? If so, I would contact them to see what worked.

### **Enlist the supervisor**

It also sounds like your boss isn't giving you much support. Ideally, the boss should lay down the law with your complaining co-worker, whom I'll call Reggie, and tell him to stop arguing with you when you are trying to train him. Reggie's resistance could be his way of putting up roadblocks to a job he doesn't really want to learn. Or it could be fear of failure, as he steps out of his comfort zone and is being forced into a new line of work. But in any case, his supervisor can counsel him on his behavior toward his trainer (you).

### **Adapt to him**

Ask Reggie how he wants to be trained. Perhaps he prefers to read and absorb instructions before

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sitting with someone and/or trying it himself. This would give him time to get used to what's being asked of him and allow him to gain some familiarity with the process. Ask him what kind of training scenario has worked well in the past for him, and why. Maybe you can adapt your style or process to be more in line with what works for him.

### **Set ground rules**

Before you even start training him, establish some ground rules. Both of you can and should have input here. Get him to agree not to interrupt, except to ask for clarification. He is not allowed to argue the process he is learning. Once he learns the task your way and does it for a while, then he is free to create a better way of doing things.

One of **his** ground rules may be that you explain **why** things are done a certain way... Or, no more than 2 hours of OJT without a break.

Whatever they are, write down rules you both can live with, and then stick to them. Call each other out if one gets broken.

### **Regarding his complaint that you are avoiding him:**

Tell him you're willing to train him, but not to have your time wasted. Agree on a set amount of time each day and tell him you need to make the most of that time because you both have other work to do. That means intensive concentration, no going off on tangents, and maximum effort put forth.

### **Use psychology**

Try to get to the bottom of the issue. Ask questions aimed at bringing him around to your way of thinking, but with his buy-in. Let him see that cooperating with you on his training will be to his benefit.\*

### **Acknowledge his criticisms**

Validate his feelings that there might be a better way of doing things, but don't let them interfere with the training. Have him jot down a note every time you get to an area that he would like to argue about, and have him put it in a "parking lot." (If you've taken a **LEAD course**, you probably know what this is.) Once it's captured briefly on paper, move on and continue with the training. Let him know that at the end of his training, his concerns and ideas will be addressed--either by you or his supervisor. If all goes well, by then he'll have a better perspective of the overall process and may dismiss some of his objections on his own.

### **When all else fails...**

Remind him that at performance review time, it's his butt on the line and the sooner he learns how to do the job, the better he'll do on his eval.

These are only a few ideas, but should be enough to get you started. It's tempting to throw up your hands and say "this shouldn't be my problem." But think of it this way: your boss has given you a challenge. Show her you're up to it. You will look particularly impressive if you can succeed where others have failed.

Good luck!

*Edits*

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